

Newsweek _____
Time _____
U.S. News & World Report _____

The Economist p15
Date 3-9 Dec 88

Interrogating Arafat

APULPIT is the wrong place for Mr Yasser Arafat. He is at his glibly evasive worst when haranguing a captive audience. He needs to be got into a quiet corner, to be asked the tough questions left over from the Palestine Liberation Organisation's claim that it has at last recognised the existence of Israel. If the answers are right, then let Mr Arafat have the pulpit, to repeat his answers to the world.

Mr George Shultz had good visceral reasons for telling Mr Arafat that he could not come to the United Nations General Assembly this week. The General Assembly is pure pulpitry: those who address it face no interrogation like that at Question Time in the House of Commons, none of the unavoidable button-holing in the corridors that is the rule on Capitol Hill and at Westminster. The American secretary of state is right to feel queasy when Mr Arafat, who says he has renounced terrorism, keeps as a member of his executive committee the man whose hijackers tipped a crippled American tourist overboard from the *Achille Lauro* in 1985.

Still, gut feelings are not enough. Mr Shultz has no good legal ground for excluding Mr Arafat from New York. The PLO's leader can probably get his UN audience in Geneva instead (see page 44). Mr Shultz stands almost alone in this matter. And, while everybody argues about orations at the UN, nobody is taking Mr Arafat quietly aside to put those tough questions to him.

A lot of people, even some pro-Palestinians, remain unconvinced that the PLO's acceptance of Security Council Resolution 242 really means acceptance of Israel: and not just because 242, necessarily vague when it was written 21 years ago, does not mention Israel by name. Here are three things a

good negotiator should now be asking Mr Arafat, to find out whether his organisation's Algiers declaration of November 15th means what he wants the world to think it means.

Will he publicly acknowledge Israel's right to exist, and to be left in peace, in something like the borders it occupied until 1967? (The Algiers declaration also mentions an earlier UN resolution, which would cut Israel back to a couple of blobs.) Does he agree that it would be better for the Palestinian state created on the land Israel evacuates to have no army (because an Israel shrunk to its pre-1967 borders, with a waistline as wide as nine lengths of the Champs Elysées, might be too tempting for an ambitious Palestinian general, and Israel might as usual be tempted to hit before it got hit)? Does Mr Arafat accept that this demilitarisation needs some checking eye, perhaps that of a Jordan confederated with Palestine—and, if so, will he make it clear that the "self-determination" he wants for Palestine in fact means such a confederation?

Send for Schlesinger

President-elect Bush should be privately putting these questions to Mr Arafat through one of those unofficial envoys American officialdom is so good at mobilising—somebody like Mr James Schlesinger, ex-defence secretary, ex-head of the CIA. If Mr Arafat's answer is yes, yes and yes, and if he will then say it out loud, he will have passed the tests that qualify him to be treated as the leader of an aspiring country. He will also have qualified his Palestine to be the subject of an international peacemaking negotiation, the outcome of which America, Russia and almost everybody else would think just and workable. In which case, could Israel long refuse to talk?